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Book Review

Reviewed work(s): Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR. Adeeb Khalid. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015. Pp. xxi + 415

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Adeeb Khalid's latest book, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR*, has been a long time in coming. We have excellent narratives of the 1920s construction of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, but the history of early 20th-century Central Asia was incomplete without the story of its most populous and urbanite state. Using sources from archives around the globe, manuscripts and notes given by friends, contemporary literature, the local press, his knowledge of Turkic, Persian, and Russian, and a deep familiarity with the time, Khalid is able to piece together what the restrictive Uzbek state has long prevented. This is the story of local Uzbek intellectuals with their own ideas of cultural reform and nation realizing a vision of modernity that was strikingly similar, though ultimately different in critical ways, to that of the Soviet state. The differences between their respective visions eventually resulted in tragedy as the state arrested or dismissed many of these intellectuals at the end of decade and executed them in the late 1930s.

This monograph is something of a sequel to Khalid's first monograph that traced the activity of the Central Asian modernizing group known as Jadids through the dying days of the Russian Empire.[1] While Jadids at that time were proponents of democratic reform, the events of 1917 radicalized them such that they came to be attracted to revolution as, what Khalid terms, a "modality of change."[2] The Soviet state offered them and other reforming Uzbek intellectuals who emerged after the revolution powerful tools for the reshaping of society. They no longer needed to beg and plead a recalcitrant nation to accept modernity peacefully. Instead, they used the coercive force of Soviet institutions to drag the nation "into the modern world, kicking and screaming if necessary."[3]

Over the course of twelve chapters, Khalid weaves a narrative that tells the familiar story of the birth of the Soviet Union but from the relatively unknown perspective of its southern borders. Moving chronologically, he demonstrates how discourses and events known to most readers of early Soviet history received new interpretations upon entering Central Asia. He covers the Central Asian anti-colonial interpretation of the Russian revolution, the Russian Civil War in Central Asia, the local debates around the creation of the national republics, the opening of the "ideological front" in 1925 by which the Soviet Union sought to assert control over the politics of the region, and the "assault" that saw these Uzbek intellectuals barred from public discourse. Thematically he discusses language reform, national delimitation, Islamic reform, women's liberation, and even film and literature.

Throughout this broad look at the decade, Khalid emphasizes the role of Uzbek intellectuals in the transformation of Soviet Central Asia. Contrary to the claims of previous scholars, locals were the driving forces behind many of the revolutionary cultural changes in the region. In the chapters on the formation of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Khalid demonstrates that Uzbek intellectuals, not Moscow, defined the ethnic categories that would make up the two republics. The early campaign against Islamic influence, as Khalid also convincingly shows, emerged not so much from the influence of Soviet atheism but from a stand-off between reforming Uzbek intellectuals and conservative Muslim Ulamo (scholars trained in Islamic thought). As the Ulamo met reformers with intransigence, the latter approached Islam with increasing aggression, dismantling its power base in the early 1920s. As a result, the eventual Soviet-led anti-religious campaign did not meet as much resistance as it otherwise might have.

The above debate between reformers and Ulamo is part of another focus at the center of Khalid's examination. Earlier scholars of Central Asia have tended to draw attention only to the opposition between Uzbek intellectuals and the Soviet colonizers, but Khalid shows that conflict among various local groups proved to be far more important in remaking the region. As much as Jadids might have wanted it, the nation was hardly united. For example, the Basmachi fighters of the Civil War, whom many observers have mistakenly dubbed national liberation fighters, hated Jadids more than the Bolsheviks. Ibrohim-bek, a Basmachi leader, tellingly congratulated the Red Army after a victory: "Comrades, we thank you for fighting with the Jadids[…] We have nothing against you, we will beat the Jadids, who overthrew our power."[4]

[1] Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform* (Berkeley, 1998).
[2] Adeeb Khalid. *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca, 2016), 1.
[3] Adeeb Khalid. *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca, 2016), 2.
[4] Adeeb Khalid. *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca, 2016), 88.

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The book deserves far less criticism than commendation. One difficulty that Khalid, however, encounters is in his interpretation of the cryptic poetry of the early 1920s. For the most part I agree with his readings, but I find his address of the Basmachi-related poetry by Jadids somewhat problematic. He correctly argues that the Basmachi were hardly freedom fighters, but in a footnote he contends that the greatest poet of this period, Cho'lpon's works should be read as lamenting the destruction brought on by the Civil War more than criticizing Soviet colonialism. I am skeptical that the Jadids did not see Basmachi as something of a national liberation movement. It is not uncommon to lionize bandits as representing something greater, and the Jadids were not immune to such romanticization as some of their poetry demonstrates.

As a scholar of literature, I can only applaud Khalid's address of the texts of this period. Khalid has packaged what is unequivocally the "golden age" of Uzbek literary modernity into an entertaining, engaging format that is sure to capture the interest of readers of literature and history alike. On top of that, he has taken on previous American scholars of this literature and turned their narrative on its head. Khalid casts off the Aesopian readings to which too many American-trained scholars have adhered, and interprets texts at their surface level.[5] For too long those Aesopian readings have deprived Uzbek literature and Uzbek history itself of its dynamism. They often rely on primitive and essentialist dichotomies of what is Soviet and what is Uzbek/Muslim without speaking to the myriad changes that those categories underwent in the early Soviet period. Khalid excellently uncovers that historical complexity through his readings, but he should receive additional praise for returning interest to the texts and their creators.

Lastly, I leave the reader with a particular hope of mine. I hope (probably against hope) that Khalid might someday be able to publish his book in Uzbekistan. This book sharply critiques the current state and popular narrative, which fetishizes Uzbeks' historical powerlessness. The history that Khalid gives Uzbeks is empowering because it demonstrates 1920s Uzbek intellectuals' tremendous role in the creation of contemporary Uzbekistan. Having become familiar with Khalid's narrative, Uzbeks may look at their present circumstances differently. The modern state of Uzbekistan and the Uzbek nation need not be something handed to them by nature or birth, by colonizers or medieval conquerors, but something they participated in building, throughout the twentieth century, with their own hands. With the knowledge of one's own participation in history comes the knowledge that one is a force for change in the present.

Christopher Fort
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan

[5] Adeeb Khalid. *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca, 2016), 19.